DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 310 RC 021 554

AUTHOR Streeter, Jenny; Bowdoin, Helen
TITLE Place-Based Education: Two Views from the Past.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 14p.; In: "Coming Home: Developing a Sense of Place in Our Communities and Schools. Proceedings of the 1997 Forum"; see RC 021 553.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Conservation (Environment); Elementary Secondary Education; *Environmental Education; Experiential Learning; Field Studies; Foreign Countries; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Lifelong Learning; Local History; *Nature Centers; Outdoor Education
IDENTIFIERS Nature; *Nature Study; *Place Based Education; Sense of Place; Stewardship; Thoreau (Henry David); White (Gilbert F)

ABSTRACT

This paper describes two institutions, in England and Massachusetts, that aim to connect students and adults to the land through the study of particular places. Gilbert White, an 18th-century curate in Selborne, England, was a keen observer and one of the earliest naturalists. His book, "The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne," has been in print continuously since 1789. His observations of birds and bats, his theories on animal migration, and his discovery of the harvest mouse as a new species are his greatest contributions. The Gilbert White Field Studies Centre integrates practical applications of mainstream subjects such as math, science, history, and geography with environmental science and natural history through outdoor field studies. Using ancient records, old observations, and modern techniques to become familiar with the history of a habitat and how it works, students and teachers can see the relevance of larger environmental trends, such as global warming, the falling water table, and human uses of "worthless" land. During his stay at Walden Pond in mid-19th-century Massachusetts, Henry Thoreau recognized the importance of humankind's relationship with the natural world. His book "Walden," and its wilderness message have inspired generations of conservationists. In the mid-1980s, the Walden Woods Project acquired areas surrounding Walden Pond that were threatened by development projects in order to preserve the land in its natural state, and in conjunction with the Thoreau Society, formed the Thoreau Institute. The Thoreau Institute's mission is to bring together the study of literature and the land, reach people with Thoreau's message, and encourage a commitment to responsible land stewardship. To that end it will house a library on Thoreau, offer curricula to public schools, and provide scholars an opportunity to study Thoreau in Walden Woods. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 421 310

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Mark K. Baldwin

1

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION:
Two Views from the Past

Jenny Streeter and Helen Bowdoin

Jenny Streeter, Gilbert White Field Studies Centre, Selborne England

In 1953, when the property in which Gilbert White had lived most of his life came onto the open market, a wealthy antiquarian dealer, Robert Washington Oates, purchased the house and put his money into establishing a joint foundation between the Oates Memorial Museum and Gilbert White Museum.

Robert Washington Oates was a nephew of Lawrence Oates, who gained his fame from having been on the fatal Scott expedition to the Antarctic. The sentence, "I'm just going outside and may be some time," is engraved into British history. Those are the words with which Lawrence Oates walked out of the tent to his death, leaving behind the three remaining members of the expedition party, who also perished.

Robert Washington Oates was looking for a place to establish a Memorial Library to his family. The Universities did not want him--though they regretted it, because all of his books formed his endowment--so Oates purchased the house in which White had lived.

I was appointed in 1974 to establish the Field Studies Centre because the museum trustees decided that we should be involved in teaching as wide a scope of British environmental sciences as is possible.

What I want to do here is to describe who Gilbert White was, what his book, *A Natural History of Selborne*, is all about, and why we think that what we do at the Centre matters.

Having died peacefully on June 26, 1793, Gilbert White was carried to his grave in Selborne Churchyard by six men who were paid ten shillings each. An enormous amount of money, but he felt very strongly that the men who carried him to his grave should be treated equally to the man who preached the sermon over his body. A very simple gray headstone is what Gilbert White requested before he died, the way his physical remains were to be remembered.

The village of Selborne is today almost identical to that which it was 200 years ago. The settlement pattern is linear, very simple. The house in which Gilbert White lived, The Wakes, has changed. All he knew was the stone central building when he first moved there in 1720. The rest of the building has been added since that time. It is still a site of local communal activities. The village fete, held every year at the end of June, is one of the big events in the village. Selborne is a village of 650 souls today.

Gilbert White was born in 1720 in the vicarage. His grandfather had been vicar of Selborne parish, so the vicarage 'went' with the living. It was a mediaeval house, timber-framed, with a large external chimney. In that house lived Gilbert White, newly born to his parents, plus the grandparents, plus two unmarried aunts. The place became

RC 021554

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

rather crowded. His father had fairly recently given up work. He had been a barrister, and having married Anne Holt, who was a minor heiress, ceased to practice.

So, Gilbert White took his interest in the church from his grandfather, not from his father. The family had to move around southern England, there was not enough room for them in the family home. In about 1729 the family moved back to this property, The Wakes. The term "The Wakes" actually comes from one of the previous owners. It is a tradition in our area to name houses after one of the owners. And this house had started probably towards the middle of the fifteenth century, as a mediaeval building. We can't date it precisely because, like many of these houses, there had been a fire at some stage which destroyed some of the evidence in the roof. But, there is no doubt that the early structure predates this building, which is late sixteenth century, probably by about one hundred years.

The Wakes became White's home for the rest of his life. He did go away to school however, to Winchester and to college at Oxford, a fundamentally important time for him.

We know that Gilbert White came back as a trained cleric, and we have quite a lot of information about his years in between. He seems something of a chameleon character; he is generally described as a mild, discreet, quiet curate, but when he was in Oxford, he behaved differently. He wore very foppish and grand clothes, played cards and drank quite considerably. We have the feeling that he rather put on the clothes of the area he was in. And so, when he came home to Selborne, which he always viewed as his home, he became this rather fine, genteel curate. I say "curate"--though he is often referred to as the "Vicar" of Selborne, he could never have been the Vicar of Selborne. In the eighteenth century, a parish would actually be allocated to people who had trained in particular colleges. Selborne was in the hands of Magdalen College at Cambridge and Gilbert White went to Oriel College. So, he could never be the vicar there.

St. Mary's Church was built around 1180 on the site of a Saxon church. It became the root for Gilbert White, as a trained cleric. Clerics would either buy or work their way into several different livings, which would pay them rent. White had one living north of London, a village called Morton Pinkney. He would go there once a year, preach a sermon, collect the rent for a year and then not be seen again. A curate did all the work the rest of the year and was paid a pittance. Because White had enough money from his mother he did not need to earn substantially, but he did have several livings and he was a careful man. (We still have hundreds of his receipts for items he purchased. Being one of the few men in the village who could write, he would write his own receipts for the money he spent.)

We don't know what Gilbert White looked like. It is said that there is a portrait in South Africa, where some of the family moved in the nineteenth century. However, there is no genuine, verifiable portrait of White, and we don't know why. It is possible that it is because, we understand, he contracted smallpox. He would not have wanted a false portrait, but neither would he have wanted his portrait showing the condition of his skin as it really was. All we have is a caricature, a pencil drawing of him in his copy of Pope's *Iliad*.

Where do we start to find a connection between Gilbert White and the present time? It comes from his ability to observe, record and communicate information. From his father, he developed an avid interest in gardening and the house had come with three or four acres when they first bought it. In the early part of his recording time, at the age of 31, he started a Garden Kalendar. Each day he would record exactly what he was doing in the garden. At this time of year, 210 years ago, he was picking cucumbers which he

had grown in a hot bed over the winter. (A hot bed is piles and piles of manure.) If you want to get crops early, through the winter in the climate you have, do as he did, mountains of horse manure will achieve the desired result.

White was interested in the wild plants in his garden, but particularly, he was an innovative gardener. This was an exciting time in eighteenth century gardening. (Tulips were the big thing, from the sixteenth century onwards. In Holland the sums paid for the black tulip, which was never actually found, ran into tens of thousands of pounds.) Everybody was hunting for the great and special and the same applied for all garden plants. We know that he worked to develop his landscape, and to buy land around The Wakes.

This is an area known as the Great Mead as it is now, and Gilbert White's sundial. This is, as far as we are able to tell, a sundial which he put up. But it's in the wrong place, on the edge of the Ha Ha. "Ha Ha" is a French term, coined, we believe, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, to describe this landscape feature, which is a ditch and then a slope to keep out the cattle, but makes you think that the garden goes on forever. As you sit in the grounds you should see no break in the landscape, between the gardens and the landscape beyond. If it was not for that sundial it would work, but Gilbert White put it on the edge and we can't move it.

Within the Ha Ha, 200 years ago, lived mole crickets, now an endangered insect in Britain. There are attempts in the U.K. to re-introduce it from a scrap community in Sussex, which is further south than Selborne. It is beautifully adapted as a burrowing animal with massive front feet. If you hold one in your hand, it digs its way through, actually forces its way between your fingers. It was common 200 years ago.

Timothy Tortoise is always associated with Gilbert White. Obviously tortoises are not native to the U.K. Not a lot of surface living reptiles have adapted to our climate. Timothy Tortoise was a Mediterranean tortoise and Gilbert White inherited him from his aunt. This is where we see the relationship between his gardening and the natural world. Timothy crossed that barrier because he lived in the garden, but visited the hills.

Timothy Tortoise was female, which he didn't know at all, and it wasn't known until the shell, which is in the British Museum, was analyzed many, many years later. Gilbert White experimented on Timothy, gently, like putting her into a barrel of water to see whether or not she was in any way aquatic. He records that she walked most disconsolately across the bottom, obviously not aquatic.

White's brother, who was a publisher, gave him a printed Naturalist's Journal, which he started to use in place of his gardener's journal in 1768. Like most of us, he couldn't keep to the columns, just wrote all the way across them. But, it was a start, it was a way of organizing his thoughts; increasingly his garden records had started to include items about other things that were going on in the natural world around him. And along with his journal, he started to write to two colleagues.

One was Thomas Pennant, an eminent zoologist; the other was James Barrington, a somewhat dilettante barrister who was interested in all sorts of things other than the law. These letters were finally put together in manuscript form, into a journal, and then into the letters which formed the manuscript of *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. That book was published in 1789. It has never been out of print. What's it about?

It's about the village and the natural world around Selborne. Opposite the house Gilbert White lived in are two of the lime trees which Gilbert White planted in front of the butcher shop because he didn't like seeing the blood running across the pavement from carcasses hanging up outside. Two of the trees are still there today.

He wrote about the daily lives of village people, for example, about the fact that they would regularly have to walk to this particular spot in the south part of the village, to obtain their drinking water.

He wrote about the antiquities. Only relatively small amounts of the antiquities are above the surface. Remains of Selborne Priory date from the 11th century. The Augustinian priory was closed in 1486 by the Pope, who considered the life of the monks there too dissolute to allow them to continue there. He sent them to other monasteries. The site is about a mile and a half east of the village.

Bones appeared when the great yew in Selborne blew down in a storm in 1990. Its girth Gilbert White had recorded, and everybody had recorded, ever since. It was said to be the finest yew in England. An archeological excavation underneath was carried out because we had some hope that we would find the remains of the Saxon church that had been there prior to the eleventh century church. What we found were mediaeval burials, only fifteenth century, dated primarily from the pottery associated with them. They were obviously not buried under the tree; the tree dates at least fourteen hundred years old, maybe older. What probably happened, is that persons were buried close to the yew and the root plate grew out over them. Enormous communal effort went into pulling the tree back up and trying to reroot it. College students from one of our nearby agricultural colleges, with ground anchors and tractors, replaced the famous tree, but to no avail. The great yew died.

White records the way to the village being down narrow lanes. The old walking ways and track ways for the pack animals became heavily eroded tracks into the village which still exist. The Queen's Hotel was at that time known as the Goat and Compasses, and he writes of the arguments in this meeting place for the village elders. He included all of this information in these early works, also the ways in which the village was structured, its housing and its materials. But, we always come back to the really important elements in his work which were his observations of the natural world.

The Hanger woodlands that White considered to be enormous, are all deciduous woodlands, but they are not what we call primary woodlands. Practically no woodlands in England, from the Wash downwards, are the original primary woodlands which colonized the site after the Ice Age. Because of human occupation, land was completely cleared of trees.

Within the area behind the Wakes and the land leading up to these Hangers, White records snipe, which would be shot as a game bird. They are extremely rare now but quite common then. He paid one of his younger brothers to cut a path all the way up the hill. It is called the Zig-Zag path. This is part of the Follies, the alterations made to the landscape at that time. At that time, it was not as heavily wooded, it was sheep down. The sheep down has gone and the woodland has returned because of the change in the agricultural practices dating from the eighteenth century onward.

These great, dark woodlands have been an essential element of English life ever since the Bronze Age. People have cleared them and used them. And many of White's early records of the natural world were concerning the use of timber on these hills. Villagers had rights to certain areas of timber and many times there was enormous trouble over who had the right to which timber. Timber provided not only building materials, but also fuel. And then, of course, the crown became involved and the larger areas of timber could not be removed by the common people.

The plant life of these deep woodlands, stinking hellebore, for example, have high chlorophyll levels. White did not know that, nor that the bird's nest orchid is actually a parasite, but he recorded the fact that these were the common places for them to be found, and the associations between the different plants, between this plant and the roots of hazel. He started to theorize about why this was.

Away from the high hills is chalk downland. Areas of ancient occupation, the roadway that we use to these hills, is called on the mediaeval maps, the road to the ancient burials. There is a strange atmosphere on these hills. We think that one of the sites that we work on, floristically very important, is probably an opened up barrow. It is characteristic of the grasslands that White knew. It is a superb location for orchids, to us quite rare, but to White very common. An unusual species, the musk orchid, only three centimeters high, still thrives on these downlands around Selborne, where they were recorded 200 years ago, the only site in the U.K. with a large population. There he also records the Stone Curlew and starts to consider camouflage and the importance of the way in which its eggs cannot be seen by the common ploughman walking across the fields. Could it be that this was an adaptation this animal had to hide its eggs, to avoid predation?

White's great contributions fall into three main categories: First, his observations of birds and bats. These have stood the test of time. Second, his theories on migration, a matter of great concern. Did it happen or didn't it? Were the same birds that White's brother saw flying over Gibraltar the same ones that left Selborne or similar areas? Third, was his discovery of the harvest mouse as a new species.

A typical exercise in the river is to examine flow patterns--mathematics in the field--in an extensive area that White writes about, Woolmer Forest. He records Black Grouse being taken out there, which now tends to be found only in Northumberland and in Scotland. Back then it was heather as far as you could see. Now, it's pine and sallow birch. The forest also had a magnificent lake, Woolmer Pond, covering sixty acres. It is now a tenth of its former size, managed as far as possible, scraped out, in order to encourage some of the wildlife, particularly the birds, amphibians, and water beetles. It is a dystrophic lake, noted for its extremely low fertility, allowing invertebrates to live there which can live no where else in the country.

We use all of these features in the work that we do with our students, who range in age from four on up. One site, a light, sandy heathland, was once nothing but heather, a site where there were Bronze Age barrows. It is due to become a sand pit. Slap in the middle of a conservation area they've permitted mineral extraction. So we will discuss with our students the value judgments that determine what will happen at this site. Not only is it going to be a

sandpit, it will be a waste tip afterwards. So, all of these issues come up based on our old records of what the site was like.

Heathland only exists at all because of human occupation; it is perceived as wasteland in much of the U.K. just as it is worldwide. Because the species on it are very discreet and often small, they are hard to understand. If you have not got public understanding, that leads to public abuse. And that stretches right through to the developers.

Students use ancient records, refer to old observations and use modern techniques to associate them with the past. We do our teacher training in the same areas. Teachers spend their days in detailed studies of habitats as well as teaching techniques. Student work is interactive, constantly evolving, and challenging. It doesn't matter whether or not that work is technically challenging to you, the teacher, it must be challenging to the students.

We must be pushing our children just as far as Gilbert White was pushing himself. We laugh at what he did, we laugh at the tortoise, we laugh at the fact that he suggested there was some truth in the local idea that some of the swallows would hibernate under ponds in the winter. We say, "How stupid." But, think about the observations he was making, the observations he was receiving from friends and colleagues. These were saying that birds were coming out of ponds, flying over ponds, puddling around the edges very early in the season, long before any had been seen flying over the coast, perhaps because the one or two early ones had been missed. We laugh at the fact that he shouted at a hive of bees with a trumpet (to see if they could hear). Why do we laugh? Do we know? Yes, with two hundred years of science behind us in addition to the work that he did. Somebody had to be the first one to shout at bees, to find out if they could hear. He did it, he recorded it. He started to theorize about whether the animals that he saw outside were related to each other on the basis of how they behaved. The Willow Warbler, the Wood Warbler and the Chiffchaff were all thought to be one species before he spent hours going outside looking at whether or not they behaved the same, whether they nested in the same way, and they did not: White concluded (by the specimens he collected as well) that, in fact, they were different species. That was proved to be so.

Gilbert White was the first to find the harvest mouse as a species. The harvest mouse is one of our smallest mice. It has a prehensile tail, lives in grasslands, and makes a small ball of a nest within which can be five or six young. White records getting hold of a nest full of live young, which is about the size of a small tennis ball, and he rolled it across the table. Not one of the babies fell out, so he started to write and discuss, Why did this happen? How did the mother get into and out of the nest? He discovered that the mother actually parts all of the grasses to go in, pulls them closed again and when she leaves the nest. His work was out of doors--it was observation, it was recording--it was essential to what we are doing now.

Our Field Studies Centre is charity funded partially by our local County Educational Authority, rather like your state educational authority. Then, we raise a small amount per capita, paid either by the school or by the children themselves. How do we make it

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

relevant? It's relevant because it is part of their heritage. It is our job to make them see, whether they are urban children or rural children, that the world in which they live is theirs. Anybody only owns land for the span of their lifetime. We need to ensure that they have an appreciation of this. You can't impose value without understanding.

I think that one of the problems with development, is that we've allowed perhaps a generation to go through in the sixties, who are now in the positions of power, who did not get the opportunities we are trying to give the children now. To say, not just, we'll go and look at this piece of land, but we'll go and look at this piece of land and try and find out how it works. How is it relevant? How is it relevant to global warming? How is it relevant to the lack of water? Why does it matter that the stream the children are working in, the stream Gilbert White records as having a range of fishes, now has only one species? What has changed? The change is in the way in which water is consumed in our area. How does that relate to global consumption of water?

We have a national curriculum that requires our children to be involved in the natural world. It requires them to have an understanding of environmental sciences along with other mainstream subjects. In a day outdoors with a group of children, we cover geography, math, science, history, English, the arts, anything that our teachers want to do, which is within the academic capacity of the staff of our centre, and if it isn't, we make sure very soon that it is within our capacity.

We have a very content heavy national curriculum. We work with it, not against it. We say, "You have a requirement to achieve a certain number of subjects, certain standards in these subjects, it is our job to show you a way to practically apply them." Many students are great when they are sitting in the classroom, they've got the books, they've got the structure, they can do it. Ask them to do it in practice and work it out for themselves and use equipment to find the basic data, and all of a sudden, life is not that simple. The able can even out with the lower achievers. Because for the lower achievers all of a sudden it's there in front of them, it's in three dimensions, and more attainable.

Every day is different. Last week, for example, before I left I spent two days with seventeen and eighteen year olds doing basic biology on fresh water ecosystems. The next day, I was working with four year olds who had never visited a woodland before. So, the group requirements are paramount, not only prescribed work from us. We work in concert with our teachers, because there is no way they can afford the time or money to come to us unless it is related to the curriculum. There will be those who go away saying they hated it. But, as far as I can recollect that's only maybe .1 percent per year. I've failed if they do not enjoy their work outside.

Where do we go physically? The existing Centre is too small. The Trust has reconstructed a seventeenth century barn, moved from about five miles away that has been donated to us. Finishing the new Centre will be expensive and take time. However, that's only the building. To us, our resource and what matters, is out in the countryside.

I have found that there is no way to ever teach children aesthetics. What we need to do is put them in the way of it as often as possible, and not be afraid to let them see that it matters to you. It matters to you as an individual and it matters historically. We are only the sum of our history. We're only what has gone past.

We have to teach children our history and put it into the future, and give children opportunities to make that future work. We have to allow the natural world to survive around them, because if the natural world doesn't survive, then humanity stands no chance whatsoever. Gilbert White never used emotive terms like that two hundred years ago, I don't think he needed to. Social and environmental pressures are so great today, I think I need to.

Helen Bowdoin
The Thoreau Institute, Lincoln, Massachusetts

Text of a video documenting the history of Walden Woods:

Have you ever wondered how America happened to preserve its millions of acres, its wilderness, national parks, national forests and wildlife refuges? It's possible to trace the original concept of wilderness preservation back to one extraordinary person who lived over a century ago, and to one special place in America. The person is Henry David Thoreau. The place is Walden Woods.

(Thoreau: "A farmer told me, in all sincerity, that having occasion to go into Walden Woods in his sleigh, he thought he never saw anything so beautiful in all his life.") In 1845, Thoreau built a small cabin near the shore of Walden Pond, a beautiful and pristine woodland lake, surrounded by square miles of pine and oak forest. Thoreau moved to Walden Woods on the fourth of July and lived there alone for two years, two months and two days.

(Thoreau: "I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite, some ponds will be thought to be bottomless.") In the decades since the publication of Thoreau's *Walden*, its reputation and influence have grown dramatically. As more and more people throughout the world have come to appreciate it as a literary masterpiece, they also recognize the importance of humankind's relationship with the natural world. Thoreau's wilderness message has inspired and guided generations of conservationists, including John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. While living at Walden, Thoreau also began to develop his influential theories on passive resistance to legalized social injustice, such as slavery. After returning to his home in the village, he assembled his ideas in an essay titled "Civil Disobedience", which has influenced some of the great liberators and thinkers of our time, including Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy.

Walden Woods covers more than four square miles in Concord, Massachusetts, and the neighboring town of Lincoln. Even today, most of Walden Woods is still forested. Some of it is protected as private or public conservation land. But, many of the environmentally sensitive and historically significant areas are vulnerable to the threat of commercial development. Past land use practices have also compromised sites in Walden Woods. For example, the Concord landfill near Walden Pond which is now slated for permanent closure, posed a serious threat to Walden Woods for the past several decades. The Walden Woods Project is committing a portion of the financing necessary to insure that the landfill site restoration is done in a manner compatible with the Walden Woods ecosystems.

In the mid-1980's, an office building and a condominium complex were poised for construction on two unprotected sites near Walden Pond. The threat to the entire area was so severe that the National Trust for Historic Preservation added Walden Woods to its list of America's eleven most endangered historic places. The condominium complex

would have been built on Bear Garden Hill, one of Thoreau's favorite areas for long pensive walks. The office park was planned for Brister's Hill, a site not far from Thoreau's cove at Walden Pond. Brister's Hill was one of the primary areas in Walden Woods where Thoreau developed his scientific theory of forest succession, a cornerstone of modern day ecology. Brister's Hill is adjacent to Concord's beautiful town forest and to historic Brister's Spring. Nearby is Tuttle's Lane, a secluded woodland path that was used by a who's who of Concord authors including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott.

(Thoreau: "If here is the largest boulder in the country, then it should not belong to an individual, nor be made into doorsteps. In some countries, precious metals belong to the crown, so here, more precious objects of great natural beauty should belong to the public.") A Concord-based organization, The Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance, called attention to the plight of Walden Woods, and in response the Walden Woods Project was founded by Don Henley in April 1990. Comprised of a diverse coalition of authors, historians, entertainers, political leaders, business leaders, and environmentalists, the Project's immediate goal was to preserve the sites threatened by commercial development with the assistance of the Trust for Public Land, a nationally known land preservation organization. The Walden Woods Project acquired Brister's Hill and Bear Garden Hill from the developers. This land will now be preserved in its natural state for future generations.

To date, the Walden Woods Project has raised over $15 million and has protected a total of 96 acres. In spite of this success, much remains to be done. Additional land must be purchased and conserved and a long-range management plan must be implemented. In July 1994, the Walden Woods Project acquired an eighteen acre site in Walden Woods, including an historic estate. It will become the Thoreau Institute and will house the world's most comprehensive research library on Thoreau and his contemporaries. A collaborative effort of the Walden Woods Project and the Thoreau Society, the Institute will offer curriculum to public schools and will provide scholars with overnight accomodations and an opportunity to study Thoreau in the midst of the author's living laboratory, Walden Woods.

A $6 million endowment must be raised for the Institute and an additional $4 million is needed for construction and renovation. The Walden Woods Project has conducted an aggressive fund raising campaign. The first Walk for Walden Woods was held on April 12, 1992. Actors Ed Begley Jr., Harry Hamlin, and Kirstie Alley joined Don Henley and seven thousand walkers on a ten kilometer pledge walk around historic Concord. In addition, benefit concerts and other special events have generated income for the project, as have foundation grants, private gifts, and support from federal and state agencies. And in a future effort to raise funds, the Walden Woods Project and American Forests Global Relief Program are selling trees grown from seed collected in Walden Woods. The small trees, twelve to eighteen inches tall, can be purchased for $35. Sales proceeds contribute to the protection of Thoreau's Woods. Supporters of the Walden Woods Project such as Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, James Michener, Whoopi Goldberg, Kurt Vonnegut, Senator Ted Kennedy, Bette Midler and Don Henley have written a book titled *Heaven is Under our Feet*, which is comprised of 67 chapters, each a different essay on the environment. All royalties from the sale of the book are donated to the Walden Woods Project.

Walden Woods, the original source of Thoreau's concepts of land conservation, has inspired the preservation of millions of acres of wilderness throughout America. We must work together to ensure that this important symbol of our environmental and cultural heritage will at last be given the protection it deserves.

(Thoreau: "I look down into the quiet parlor of the fishes, abated by a softened light, as through a window of ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer, there a perennial waveless serenity reigns. As in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet, as well as over our heads.")

***

Helen Bowdoin

The Thoreau Institute has a three-fold mission: To bring together the study of literature and the land, to reach people with Thoreau's message, and to encourage a commitment to responsible land stewardship. It's an enormous pleasure for us to collaborate with the Roger Tory Peterson Institute on the Selborne Project. The educational missions of our two Institutes are closely matched. In July, we are bringing a group of Massachusetts teachers out here and we look forward in coming years to holding similar workshops back in Lincoln.

The Institute won't open formally until the spring of 1998. Thanks to three very generous donors the new library and archives building will house the most comprehensive collection of books and materials by and about Thoreau in the world. A sophisticated media center will launch Thoreau into cyberspace. Thoreau's works, related commentary, graphics and educational programs for teachers and students and the general public will also become accessible over the Internet. We will be offering classroom link ups and aim to put teachers and students from far and near in touch to share their work together. On-site educational programming for teachers and students at all learning levels also is under way. We invite teachers to come and visit.

In 1720, Gilbert White was born in the English village of Selborne. In 1817, nearly one hundred years later, Henry David Thoreau was born in the Massachusetts town of Concord. In 1908, Roger Tory Peterson was born, here, in the community of Jamestown, New York.

Their lives spanning three centuries, each of these men left an indelible mark on the fields of natural history, literature and art. The common threads surrounding their work are strong and interwoven. Each grew up in rural or semi-rural surroundings, each was a meticulous scholar, each a lifelong student. Each possessed an undying passion for nature, and, thankfully for us, the talents to express that passion through a lasting legacy of art and literature. That all three have nearly universal appeal, may be partly because they knew how to reach and excite ordinary people like ourselves, who want to explore the world of nature and learn with them.

So what's the connection between Thoreau and place-based education? And if there is one, who really cares? The connection is that what goes around, comes around; the latest trend of place-based education can easily be traced right back to Thoreau, Gilbert White, and others.

While most of us are familiar with Thoreau as a writer and naturalist, we are not all aware that he was also a surveyor, inventor, philosopher, and poet. In this extraordinary

confluence of talents lies much of his genius. So what did he want to do after graduating from Harvard (which he found boring)? Teach. "What does education often do? It makes a straightcut ditch of a free meandering brook," he said, hoping perhaps to make a break with traditional teaching methods. Here is an excerpt from one of his letters in 1837, the year he graduated. Notice this was radical thinking for the time: "I seek a situation in a small school or assistant in a large one. . . . I would make education a pleasant thing to both the teacher and the student. This discipline, which we allow to be the end of life, should not be one thing in the schoolroom, and another in the street. We should seek to be fellows with the pupil, we should learn of, as well as with him, if we would be most helpful to him."

Thoreau succeeded in landing a teaching job in Concord but the experience proved a failure. Asked to flog a student, he was repelled at the notion of beating as a routine activity so he quit only days after he had been hired.

Undaunted, he founded his own school. It thrived, and he was joined by his brother John. It closed several years later only because of John's poor health. As a teacher beloved by children throughout his life, Thoreau did take his pupils out into the street and beyond. It is likely we can credit him as inventor of the field trip, with no permission slips, no buses and no lunch money. A favorite destination was Calla Swamp, a wetland at the northern end of Concord, today, still filled with a rare diversity of plants and animals. A spot to explore, no doubt, and for teacher and students to learn together. Probably some time for free play at the end of the day too. To Thoreau, it was clear that children who develop an appreciation and understanding of their home communities--what today we call place-based education--gain a directness, immediacy, even an intimacy that no text can rival. And he likely would have added that no video or TV program can rival either.

Like White, Thoreau spent nearly an entire lifetime walking, studying, and writing about his home town. Contrary to his stereotype, he took a keen interest in many of the townspeople and farmers; his favorites tended to be the down-and-outers. He strongly and publicly opposed slavery and was active in Concord's Underground Railroad.

Thoreau understood the value of studying interconnections between the natural and cultural histories of our home ground. Thoreau well knew that Concord harbored a surprising diversity of habitat; that it once had been a Native American settlement, that it held a proud place in colonial history. But beyond that he had the vision to see as no one else before him that every community has its own rich and layered stories to tell. He saw that every community has its own Walden.

Kids who are encouraged to draw their own maps of a place special to them, who learn the history of an old building nearby, mark the seasons, identify, sketch and write about their favorite trees and wildflowers, birds, insects and mammals, these are the kids who develop special respect and understanding for a place. What we see, touch, feel

and come to understand first hand, we want to care for and respect. Thus, with guidance, will students identify their own Waldens, whether it be a stream, an historic building, a five-acre field, a vacant lot, or an entire community. Stewardship of place follows naturally enough when we combine love of beauty with the close understanding that is gained through direct experience.

As Thoreau infused Walden with symbolic meaning, so he did with Concord. For him Concord *was* the world. He understood then what many of us since have overlooked--that before we try to understand what's happening half a world away, we learn about what we have (or may be losing) here at home. As a young man, Thoreau watched as Concord began losing its few remaining woodlands--cleared as the scale of farming grew to meet the expanding agricultural markets. Thoreau fled to Walden Woods to live and write. He subtitled *Walden "Life in the Woods."*

Only three years before his early death at forty-four, Thoreau wrote in his journal:

"Each town should have a park or rather a primitive forest of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation . . . inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country. All Walden Woods might have been preserved for our park forever, with Walden in its midst. . . . A town is an institution which deserves to be remembered. We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses. We are all schoolmasters, and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or the schoolhouse while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed is absurd. If we do not look out we shall find our fine schoolhouse standing in a cowyard at last."

Thoreau said once, "I have never got over my surprise at being born in the most estimable a place in all the world and in the very nick of time, too." When he was thirty-six, he wrote in his journal, "I cannot but regard it as a kindness in those who have the steering of me that, by the want of pecuniary wealth, I have been nailed down to this my native region so long and steadily and made to study and love this spot of earth more and more. What would signify in comparison a thin and diffused love and knowledge of the whole earth instead, got by wandering?"

I'll tell you a little story, a sort of a community fable, which has unfolded in Concord over the past eighteen months. Concord never much liked Thoreau. He was far out--weird. Why wouldn't he just fit in and act like everybody else? His clothes were a little funny, he spent way too much time outside walking, apparently not working.

That attitude persisted, surprisingly, right down to the present. So when Thoreau's birthplace, a lovely old farm, came onto the market over a year ago, few people in town noticed or cared. But those few shouted loudly and long enough into the ears of the Concord selectmen to wake them up. Finally they decided they cared too. The local press woke up and ran prominent articles on the famous 18-acre farmstead threatened by suburban tract housing. Third graders wrote letters to the newspaper's editor. In twelve months time a real partnership of town officials, grassroots groups and private citizens put together $960,000 of state, municipal, foundation, and private funding necessary to purchase and protect the property where Thoreau was born.

The naysayers, the "you'll never do it" crowd, lost out. But the best moment came just at the end of April when the conservative town finance committee mailed its annual report to every household in the Town of Concord prior to Town Meeting. There on the cover was a picture of Thoreau's birthplace, displayed as a real estate ad, dramatizing the urgent need to save it. As it happened, the cover was the brainchild of two clerks

who worked at the town hall. And it wasn't until we learned who had thought of it, that we knew the entire community had pulled together at last in a townwide push to save the home of someone whom everyone had learned to care about.

Father of the twentieth century's conservation movement, Thoreau was able to see the need to study the entire fabric of a community's life--the built environment and the natural environment, the people and the places, the plants and the animals--in the past and in the present. His was a lifelong search for harmony or "concord" between people and nature. He found that concord in his own life, and he pointed the way toward it for all of us who reflect deeply and often on the meaning of his writings.

Whatever our age or stage in life, there's always more to learn about our home place, more to discover and appreciate, and more to find that we care about and want to care for. Coming home, if we choose, can become a lifelong practice which will enrich our own lives and those of our students, and invigorate our entire community.